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TVO Participation in the Seventh OISE Survey on Public Attitudes Toward Education in Ontario (1988)

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Working Paper 89-4

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by
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July 1989

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report describes TVOntario's first involvement in the OISE biannual study "Public Attitudes Toward Education in Ontario."

The areas added to this study and reported in this paper concern:

- viewing of TVOntario and La chaîne française
- interest in television courses
- attitudes toward educational television and
- attitudes toward using computers for learning

Since the levels of viewing of both networks reported in this study are noticeably higher than those found in other research, possible reasons for the discrepancies are suggested.

RÉSUMÉ DE LA DIRECTION

Le présent rapport décrit la première participation de TVOntario à l'enquête biannuelle de l'IEPO intitulé «Public Attitudes Toward Education in Ontario».

Les nouveaux domaines couverts par cette enquête et décrits dans le document sont les suivants:

- écoute de TVOntario and La chaîne française
- intérêt suscité par le télé-enseignement
- attitudes envers la télévision éducative et
- attitudes envers l'utilisation d'ordinateurs pour l'apprentissage

Puisque les cotes d'écoute des deux chaînes faisant l'objet de cette étude sont nettement plus élevées que dans le cas d'autres recherches, on suggère les raisons éventuelles de ces divergences.

TVO Participation in the Seventh OISE Survey on Public Attitudes Toward Education in Ontario (1988)

OISE 's "Public Attitudes Toward Education in Ontario" is a biannual study which has been providing readings of public attitudes related to education since 1976. In recent years, the primary researchers, David Livingstone and Doug Hart have been seeking educational partners outside OISE to broaden and support the study. Planning and Development Research was asked to explore the potential benefits and costs of adding questions of interest to TVOntario. This year the Ministry of Education added questions as well as ourselves.

In formulating questions, we studied the questions in the former OISE studies and the 1985 TVO Image Study and consulted with Livingstone and Hart. As a first step in assessing how we can best use this source of data, we added six questions to the OISE survey to find out about viewing of TVO and La chaîne française, about interest in television courses, about attitudes toward educational television, and about attitudes toward using computers for learning. Excerpts from the report concerning these areas are included in the Appendix.

The data in this study indicate that people who have a positive attitude toward education in one area will be supportive in other areas as well. Those who would like to see an increase in government spending on education are somewhat more likely to watch TVOntario once a week or more and to consider following a television course.

Viewing of TVO and/or La chaîne française

• 43% of adult Ontarians reported watching TVOntario and/or La chaîne française once a week or more.

This is almost double the percentage of regular viewers reported in BBM weekly figures or in the 1985 Market Research study of TVO adult audiences.

Although BBM statistics are known to underestimate small audiences such as ours, only a small portion of the discrepancy found here can be attributed to BBM shortfalls.

Possible reasons for this discrepancy are that:

◊ Unlike BBMs or the 1985 survey, this survey did not ask viewers about viewing of other stations, thus increasing the likelihood that respondents will lump together educational viewing on a number of channels, such as TVO, PBS.

◊ This survey itself is about education, a subject that notoriously evokes public support (even when schooling is criticized). In this context, people may have been especially likely to overestimate their own good/educational participation/viewing, especially since viewing of other channels was not asked.

◊ In the past three years, it seems that people have increased their channel switching during commercials and programs and their viewing of segments of programs. By including people who only watch 5 or 10 minutes of a program, the increased number of people viewing once a week or more may be somewhat exaggerated.

◊ Adults who are closeby when their children are watching children's programs may be counting themselves as viewers.

Where the sample size was large enough to allow for breakdowns, additional crosstabulations were requested to look at responses in subgroups. The findings listed below offer some additional information about Ontario adults viewing behaviour and attitudes toward educational television.

◊ The 18-24 year age group is least likely to watch TVOntario once a week or more (30.5%), compared to the overall figure of 43%. Differences among the other age groups were not statistically significant or consistent.

◊ As we would expect from earlier studies, those with more education are more likely to be TVO viewers:

Percentage viewing once a week or more.

Elementary education	32%
Some high school	40%
Completed high school	41%
Non-university post secondary	48%
University	48%

◊ Those reporting French as their ethnic background are most likely to view TVOntario once a week or more, followed by British viewers, those from other European groups and those from non-Europeans origins.

French	55%
British	45%
Other Europeans	38%
Non-Europeans	33%

◊ No statistically significant differences in viewing were found according to gender, occupation, income, region of Ontario, community size or political party preference.

• 22% of Ontario adults reported watching La chaîne française at least once in the last year.

• 7.7% reported watching la Chaîne once a week or more

As stated above, people have a tendency to overestimate their viewing of educational programmes. This tendency should be noted when considering the statistics for La chaîne française as well.

Courses on Educational Television

The solid support found for the value of educational television at home (86%) and in school (76%) is impressive. This data indicates strong interest in more than entertainment experiences with television at home. This is consistent with the data presented in the NFB study, "Trends in Television Viewing; Documentaries and The Audience for Information Programming," Crowley, Jeffrey, McAninch. NFB: May, 1988.

Second, this data suggests that the proportion of parents and teachers who see school video as a teachers' cop-out or a source of entertainment on a Friday afternoon has fallen in recent years.

Value of Educational Television for Learning

- 8% reported having 'followed a course on educational television' at some time, and 42% 'would consider following a course on educational television'. The 8% represents 560 000 Ontario adults. It should be noted that the question was worded as broadly as possible to attempt to include those who watch a few programs in a documentary or instructional series as 'followers of a course'. Questions that ask about taking or registering for a course would likely produce lower figures. Encouraging is the finding that up to 40% of those with lower educational attainments who rarely take adult education courses are interested in courses on educational television.

- Younger adults are more likely to consider following a television course than are older people. Among those 18 to 44, 50% would consider a TV course, compared to 41% of those 45 to 54, 31% of those 55 to 64 and 25% of those 65 or over.

Value of Computers for Learning

As with educational television, computers are felt to be valuable for learning by a large majority of adults. Ninety-five percent said computers are valuable for learning at school; 92% responded that computers are valuable for learning at work, and 88% reported that computers are valuable for learning at home. It would seem from these results that computers are making definite inroads into everyday life, becoming more accessible and gaining recognition as a useful tool for learning.

CONCLUSION

Given the modest costs of participation in this study and the interesting if inconclusive results, we expect to participate in the 1990 survey. Additional questions concerning such areas as TVO's image or the types of educational programs needed will be considered in light of other research studied undertaken in the interim.

APPENDIX

Public Attitudes Toward Education in Ontario 1988

Seventh OISE Survey*

D.W. Livingstone, D.J. Hart, and L.E. Davie

Ontario Institute for Studies in Education

November, 1988

*An edited version of this report will form the February issue of Orbit. This issue can be ordered from OISE Press, 252 Bloor st. W., Toronto, M5S 1V6. Prepayment $3.00 Cdn.

Educational Television and Learning

Table 32 shows that about three-quarters of the respondents indicated that they had watched one of the two TV Ontario channels sometime during the past year. Forty-three percent indicated that they watched at least one or two times per week. These figures indicate that educational television is an important part of the learning resources for adults. Even excluding those respondents who watch TV Ontario infrequently, we find that a large number of the adults in Ontario are using TV Ontario for information on a regular basis. To further explore the use of educational television, we asked about the perceived value of educational television for learning.

Value of Educational Television for Learning

As Table 33 indicates, a large majority of participants think that educational television is very valuable or somewhat valuable for learning. The perceived value is greatest for learning at home (86 percent) and at school (79 percent). A bare majority of 51 percent of the respondents felt that television would be very valuable or somewhat valuable for learning in the workplace.

Courses on Educational Television

While a large majority sees value in educational television for learning at home, and a substantial minority (43 percent) report watching TVOntario channels weekly, few respondents report following a course on educational television (see Table 34). Only eight percent of respondents indicated that had followed a course on educational television. However, 42 percent indicated that they would consider following such a course.

Returning to Table 29, we can compare the willingness to follow a course by television to the actual participation in adult education courses in the past year. (The comparison here is with responses to the adult education question. Too few respondents reported following a course on educational T.V. to allow analysis of background differences.) By examining age, we see the general pattern of direct correlation between age and the willingness to follow a course by educational television. However, those indicating that they would consider following a television course are more widely distributed than the pattern of actual participation in an adult education course. Many more older adults are interested in following a course on television than reported actually taking an adult education course in the past year.

The same phenomenon is true for the relationship with prior education. The response is more widely distributed, with a larger proportion of individuals with less prior education being interested in following a course on educational television than have followed a course. For actual participation, the ratio between the lowest and highest educational category is approximately 1:7; while the ratio between the lowest and highest categories in willingness to follow a course on educational television is approximately 1:3.

Finally, we see the same pattern in the relations with family income. In actual participation, the ratio is about 1:5, while the ratio for willingness to follow a television course is approximately 1:3. It seems clear, that providing alternate means to study than the traditional face to face course might ameliorate the class bias in current adult education.

Value of Computers for Learning

Another interesting comparison with the perception of the value of educational television for learning is with the use of computers. Table 33 indicates that the overwhelming majority of respondents felt that computers were valuable for learning. Ninety-five percent of the respondents felt that computers would be useful at school for learning, ninety-two percent felt that they would be useful in the workplace and a total of eighty-eight percent felt they would be useful for learning in the home. Thus, slightly more respondents felt that computers would be valuable for learning in the work place than be educational television would be. Nevertheless, both educational technologies are highly valued for learning.

SUMMARY

Public satisfaction with the overall situation in Ontario schools has continued to decline. Increasingly, dissatisfaction is linked to perceptions of declining quality in the high school system. This does not mean, however, that an increasing proportion of Ontarians see a decline in quality. Perceptions of changes in the quality of high school education have, in fact, remained nearly the same over the past decade. However, in contrast to the beginning of the decade, a majority of those who see a decline in quality are now dissatisfied with the schools: previously, only among those who thought the quality of high school education had 'greatly deteriorated', did a majority report being dissatisfied with the school system in general.

It should be noted that despite the increase in dissatisfaction with the schools since 1982, the dissatisfied continue to constitute a minority -- currently about one-third. Similarly, only about a third think that the quality of high school education has declined. Views on changes in the competence of elementary and high school teachers follow essentially the same pattern.

Support for increased funding of the public educational system and for all specific types from elementary through university levels has continued to grow in recent years, with the majority of Ontarians now favouring increased funding at all levels. Support for increased funding of adult training programs remains even higher. The public remains divided, however, in its personal willingness to pay increased taxes to fund increased education spending. A small majority now favour paying for public education through increasing the share of provincial taxes and reducing property taxes. A definite majority of Ontarians continue to support the full funding of Catholic schools, but there is less support for extending funding to private schools. There also seems to be plurality support for the general idea of transferring buildings of public schools with declining enrollment to the Catholic system with growing enrollment.

In terms of the possible extension of educational services, a bare majority favour continuing to provide childhood education from age five rather than starting earlier. A definite majority oppose the integration of heritage languages instruction into the regular school day. A strong majority express the belief that a postsecondary education is what is needed to get along in this society. Similar proportions oppose the imposition of entry quotas on postsecondary programs, and support the alternative use of vacant school space for adult education programs.

After 'the basics' (reading, writing and math skills), Ontarians appear to give priority to curricular objectives emphasizing the personal development of students rather than knowledge of

Table 32: "How often, if ever, have you watched TV Ontario/La chaine Francaise, during the past year?"

	%
Never	24
Less than once a month	20
Less than once a week	11
One or two times per week	23
Three or four times per week	8
Five or more times per week	12
Not stated	3
N	1,011

(ADDED FROM RAW DATA, DID NOT APPEAR IN OISE REPORT)

HOWTVO24 HOW OFTEN WATCH TVO

VALUE LABEL	VALUE	FREQUENCY	PERCENT		VALID PERCENT	CUM PERCENT
never	1	253	25.0		25.7	25.7
/ 1 month	2	206	20.3		20.9	46.6
/ 1 week	3	111	11.0		11.3	57.8
1-2 week	4	226	22.3		22.9	80.7
3-4 week	5	75	7.4	41.1	7.6	88.3
5+ week	6	115	11.4		11.7	100.0
	0	26	2.6		MISSING	
	TOTAL	1011	100.0		100.0	

VALID CASES 985 MISSING CASES 26

HWFRE25 HOW OFTEN WATCH LA CHAÎNE FRANÇAISE

VALUE LABEL	VALUE	FREQUENCY	PERCENT		VALID PERCENT	CUM PERCENT
never	1	785	77.6		78.2	78.2
/ 1 month	2	112	11.1		11.2	89.4
/ 1 week	3	29	2.9		2.9	92.3
1-2 week	4	53	5.3		5.3	97.6
3-4 week	5	8	.8	7.7	.8	98.4
5+ week	6	16	1.6		1.6	100.0
	0	8	.8		MISSING	
	TOTAL	1011	100.0		100.0	

VALID CASES 1003 MISSING CASES 8

Table 33: Value of Educational Television and Computers for Learning

	Very valuable %	Somewhat valuable %	Of little or no value %	Don't know/ Not stated %	N
"How valuable do you think educational television is for learning?"					
At home	42	44	11	3	1,011
At school	30	49	16	6	1,011
At work	16	35	38	11	1,011
"How valuable do you think the use of computers is for learning:"					
At home	49	39	7	5	1,011
At school	68	27	2	3	1,011
At work	64	28	4	4	1,011

Table 34: "Have you ever followed (would you consider following) a course carried on educational television?"

	Yes %	N
Have followed a course	8	1,011
Would consider following a course	42	1,011

Table 29: Participation in Adult Education by Background

	Have taken an adult ed. course in past year %	Would consider a course on educational television %	N
All respondents	24	42	1,011
Age			
18-24	38	50	147
25-34	33	49	243
35-44	32	52	196
45-54	16	41	139
55-64	11	31	147
65 +	6	19	129
Education			
Elementary	5	20	131
High school incomplete	16	35	197
High school complete	23	40	250
Non-university post-secondary	35	51	211
University	36	53	221
Family income			
Under $10,000	28	38	56
$10,000 to $14,999	6	26	53
$15,000 to $19,000	13	21	60
$20,000 to $29,999	22	37	135
$30,000 to $39,999	22	41	156
$40,000 to $59,999	30	52	185
$60,000 and over	33	57	185
Occupational class			
Corporate executives	28	51	123
Small employers	25	44	35
Self-employed	23	41	31
Managers	31	64	47
Professional employees	43	53	76
Supervisors	40	47	154
Non-industrial workers	30	46	121
Industrial workers	16	44	106
Unemployed	25	36	21
Homemakers	12	34	178
Retired	4	22	118
Students	40	48	61